

MAY 14 1966

Letters to the Editor of The Times

Defense Official Denies Raid Over Laos

To the Editor:

On April 13 The Times published a dispatch from Saigon under the byline of R. W. Apple Jr. in which he reported on the first raid by B-52 bombers of the Strategic Air Command against a target in North Vietnam.

The official communiqué of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (M.A.C.V.) on this raid stated: "U.S. Air Force B-52's struck in North Vietnam this morning for the first time, hitting the Mu Gia Pass, about 65 miles south of Vinh."

Mr. Apple did not choose to use this official report anywhere in his story. On the contrary, he said that "usually reliable sources said that the B-52's had not dropped their 750-pound and 1,000-pound bombs in North Vietnam at all, but on a section of Mu Gia Pass that lies in Laos."

This statement by Mr. Apple is utterly false. The B-52's struck, as stated in the communiqué, in North Vietnam only.

Mr. Apple wrote further that "these sources said the target had been shifted after last-minute reconnaissance." This too is absolutely untrue.

Mr. Apple then got around to state that "an Air Force spokesman denied the report," meaning Mr. Apple's false report.

Report Double-Checked

Col. William McGinty, Director of Information, Seventh Air Force, was the Air Force

spokesman queried by Mr. Apple. Colonel McGinty reports that after double-checking the fact that the raid had been in North Vietnam only, he went to The Times office in Saigon and informed Mr. Apple his information was absolutely false. Colonel McGinty says he tried to impress on Mr. Apple that publication of such a false report would be harmful to the United States. Colonel McGinty reports that Mr. Apple thanked him, but stated he was satisfied his "source" was accurate.

The end result was that The New York Times correspondent refused to report the official United States communiqué on the raid issued by the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, further refused to consider the information provided by Colonel McGinty of the Seventh Air Force, and chose instead to report a falsehood which The Times displayed at the top of Page 1.

I think the readers of The Times have a right to know the truth.

ARTHUR SYLVESTER
Assistant Secretary
of Defense

Washington, May 1, 1966

[Mr. Apple did not refuse to report the Air Force's communiqué or the information provided by Colonel McGinty. He took account of the communiqué when he stated that the United States planes had dropped their bombs on the Mu Gia Pass. He additionally reported from other sources that the bombing was in a section of the Pass in Laos. He included Colonel McGinty's denial of this report. Editor, The Times.]

Caliber of C.I.A. Staff

To the Editor:

While your series on the C.I.A. quite properly notes that it is men, and not the forms of control, which are critical, it failed in one very important sense to follow up the point of that observation. For it is not only the men at the top who count, but perhaps even more importantly, the men in the field.

What worries a good many people is the likelihood that C.I.A. personnel practices, geared to a narrow view of national security needs, tend to produce a staff representing a very limited and partisan range of the political spectrum. To the extent that this is the case, the danger of excessive zeal is not nearly so much the result of combining intelligence and operations as it is the product of creating an agency which has a

built-in political point of view.

The virtues of detachment and objectivity are no less important for an intelligence agency than they are for a court, and in this regard the admonition of Justice Holmes seems remarkably timely: "One has to remember that when one's interest is keenly excited evidence gathers from all sides around the magnetic point." This danger, Justice Frankfurter wisely noted, "should be particularly heeded at times of agitation and anxiety, when fear and suspicion impregnate the air we breathe."

The fact that there may be liberal analysts in Virginia does not assuage the concern of those who wonder about the kind of men who are planning and carrying out the "dirty tricks." An article dealing with personnel hiring practices might very well be more significant than further rehashing of adventures which had already largely become matters of public knowledge.

JOSEPH L. SAX

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University of California
Berkeley, April 28, 1966